
First records for Sierra Leone of Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* and Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

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Premières observations pour la Sierra Leone de la Spatule blanche *Platalea leucorodia*, du Canard souchet *Anas clypeata* et du Chevalier bargette *Xenus cinereus*. Lors des dénombrements d'oiseaux d'eau organisés le long de la côte de la Sierra Leone en janvier–février 2005, trois migrants paléarctiques ont été observés pour la première fois dans le pays: la Spatule blanche *Platalea leucorodia* (12 individus à Sasiyek Creek, 08°56'N 13°14'W, près de l'île Yeliboya, le 9 février), le Canard souchet *Anas clypeata* (au moins 18 individus à Kagboroo Creek, 07°57'N 12°53'W, dans la Baie de Yawri, le 28 janvier) et le Chevalier bargette *Xenus cinereus* (un individu, également à Kagboroo Creek, le 28 janvier).

In January–February 2005, a waterbird census was undertaken at five coastal wetlands in Sierra Leone: Scarcies Estuary, Sierra Leone River Estuary, Yawri Bay, Turtle Islands and Sherbo Island. In total, 93,000 waterbirds were counted and more than 100,000 were estimated to be present in coastal brackish and marine wetlands (van der Winden *et al.* 2007). Three Palearctic migrants were observed that were previously unrecorded in Sierra Leone (Dowsett 1993): Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* and Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*. All were identified by at least two observers with extensive experience of these species in Eurasia. The exact status of all three species in Sierra Leone is unknown. Because coastal waterbird census work was highly sporadic and far from complete in the past, scarce species might easily have gone undetected. The census in 2005 suggested these species are either vagrants or more or less regular visitors in very small numbers. Details are presented below.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

A flock of 12 was at Sasiyek Creek (08°56'N 13°14'W), in the Scarcies Estuary near Yeliboya Island, on 9 February 2005. The flock flew north-west at low altitude. It comprised at least two adults and eight immatures; two individuals could not be aged. The adults were distinguished from the locally relatively common African Spoonbill *P. alba* by the absence of bare red facial skin, black bill with yellow tip (grey with red cutting edges in *P. alba*) and black (not red) legs. The yellow-

tipped bill is indicative of the nominate race (the subspecies *balsaci*, an endemic resident of the Banc d'Arguin, north-west Mauritania, has an all-black bill). The immatures could not be separated with certainty from African Spoonbill, but their pinkish bills suggested they were Eurasian Spoonbills (the bill of immature African Spoonbills tends to be more yellowish: Borrow & Demey 2001).

The species' nearest regular and most important wintering grounds are in the coastal area between Mauritania and southern Senegal (e.g. Overdijk 2001). Eurasian Spoonbills winter less regularly along the coasts of Guinea-Bissau and Guinea, and patchily inland in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, north-east Nigeria and Chad (Cramp & Simmons 1977, Brown *et al.* 1982, Borrow & Demey 2001).

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

At least 18 Northern Shovelers were at Kagboroo Creek (07°57'N 12°53'W), in Yawri Bay near Shenge, on 28 January 2005. Amongst them were at least two adult males, both moulting into breeding plumage. Six individuals resting within a flock of 165 Northern Pintails *A. acuta* were observed at close range, whilst another 12 were seen in flight accompanied by one female or immature Garganey *A. querquedula*.

In West Africa, Northern Shoveler is fairly common throughout the Sahel zone, mainly at inland freshwater sites (Brown *et al.* 1982). It is a vagrant to coastal areas of Guinea (Demey 2006), Liberia (Gatter 1997), Côte d'Ivoire (Borrow & Demey 2001), Ghana (Grimes 1987) and Nigeria

(Elgood *et al.* 1994). Yawri Bay was the only marine coastal site in Sierra Leone where Palearctic ducks were found during the survey.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

A single was observed at Kagboroo Creek (07°57'N 12°53'W), in Yawri Bay near Shenge, on 28 January 2005. It was feeding at the edge of an intertidal bank and observed from less than 100 m. The bird was compared with many other wader species present, including Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Common Greenshank *T. nebularia*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Bartailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* and Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*. It differed from all these by its typical, long, slightly upturned bill and shortish legs, thus resembling a long-billed Common Sandpiper. The bill base and legs were yellowish.

In Africa, Terek Sandpiper winters mainly on eastern and southern coasts, from the Red Sea to South Africa and Namibia (Urban *et al.* 1986). Some trans-Saharan passage is indicated by rare but regular autumn appearances at desert pools in central Chad, and August–September records from the Lake Chad area in Nigeria (Cramp 1983). These vagrants probably winter on the West African coast, which premise is supported by records (of 1–5 birds) from Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana (Borrow & Demey 2001), Togo (Cheke & Walsh 1996), Benin (M. Poot pers. obs.) and Nigeria (Elgood *et al.* 1994).

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